

# CONSOLIDATED SKILL MATRIX



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This executive report provides a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence-based research conducted within Work Package 2 (WP2), establishing the analytical foundation for the VoWoCo project's mission to empower women through career transitions and entrepreneurial revitalization. To ensure that subsequent training modules, mentoring structures, and policy recommendations are grounded in professional reality, the project integrated three critical streams of evidence: standardized focus group studies capturing the authentic "venture-speak" and lived entrepreneurial journeys of 36 women across Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Türkiye; a rigorous labor market analysis that serves as an "external reality check" by aligning participant needs with objective economic data and emerging market trends; and a multidisciplinary expert panel validation involving 22 international stakeholders to verify the practical utility and strategic robustness of our findings.

The research resulted in the development of a validated skills matrix. The skill matrix is organized into a sophisticated three-tier hierarchy—comprising 65 granular skills, 17 broader themes, and 4 master dimensions—which reveals a unique entrepreneurial model that is primarily relationally embedded, operationally grounded, and psychologically demanding. By comparing these results across national borders, this report moves beyond a "one-size-fits-all" approach to identify distinct entrepreneurial orientations—from Italy's relational embedding to Hungary's psychological capital—while highlighting Gender-Institutional Navigation as a universal challenge shared by women across contemporary Europe. Ultimately, these findings provide the essential building blocks for designing context-sensitive learning pathways that address real-world resource constraints and help women navigate complex, gendered ecosystems with resilience and strategic agility.

# Focus Groups

## Objective

Focus group studies were conducted to establish an empirical, data-driven foundation for the women entrepreneurs by listening directly to the "venture-speak" and entrepreneurial journeys of women across Europe. By systematically identifying current skill profiles and perceived deficiencies across diverse industrial sectors, the project moved beyond theoretical assumptions to understand the real-world operational challenges these women face daily. This qualitative data served as the essential building block for constructing a robust Skills Matrix, which is an evidence-based framework that delineates the specific competencies required for women to succeed in entrepreneurship and leadership roles across diverse European contexts.

## Methodology

Focus group studies were run simultaneously in Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Türkiye using a standardized cross-national design. A stratified purposeful sampling strategy was employed to ensure diverse representation across three primary target groups: women re-entering the workforce, women starting or revitalizing businesses, and women in managerial roles. The study also ensured representation from both men-dominant and women-dominant industries.

In total, **36 women participated** (9 per country). The participants were highly educated, with nearly 89% holding at least a bachelor's degree, and many balancing significant caregiving responsibilities. The qualitative data were processed through an intensive iterative coding process by three independent researchers to mitigate bias and enhance validity. This resulted in a sophisticated three-tier hierarchy consisting of **65 first-order skills, 17 second-order skill themes, and 4 overarching dimensions.**

- **65 First-Order Skills:** These are granular, individual skills identified directly from the "venture-speak" or actual statements made by women entrepreneurs during focus groups (e.g., "Strategic Mapping," "Relational Empathy").
  - **Core Skill Findings and Contextual Reality**

The five most frequently cited individual skills were Strategic Mapping (5.4%), Individual Domain Expertise (4.2%), Relational Empathy (3.8%), Navigating Laws (3.6%), and Refusing to Quit (3.6%). Strategic Mapping, the most dominant skill, underscores the need to structure uncertainty and transform abstract visions into concrete action plans. Relational Empathy and Navigating Laws highlight the dual burden of managing complex interpersonal dynamics while complying with rigid regulatory frameworks.

- **17 Broader Skill Themes:** The 65 skills are categorized into theoretically grounded themes like "Networking & Social Capital" and "Self-Regulation & Drive".
  - At the thematic level, Networking & Social Capital (15.2%), Self-Regulation & Drive (13.1%), and Strategic Planning (10.2%) emerged as the most salient areas. This concentration suggests that success is deeply embedded in social ecosystems and requires intense internal psychological regulation to manage transitions and external constraints.
  
- **4 Main Skill-Sets (Dimensions):** These themes are consolidated into master dimensions:
  - **Relational & Social (35.2%):** The dominant pillar of women's entrepreneurship in this sample, highlighting the importance of networking, social capital, and institutional navigation.
  - **Management & Operations (29.6%):** Reflects the practical demands of business coordination, including financial management, legal compliance, and technical skills.
  - **Personal & Behavioral (19.8%):** Centers on internal resources such as resilience, self-regulation, and drive.
  - **Cognitive & Strategic (15.4%):** Represents the smallest proportion of expressed competencies, focusing on innovation, strategic planning, and opportunity recognition.

Importantly, the findings indicate that women entrepreneurs in this context are primarily engaged in **navigating complex, resource-constrained, and gendered ecosystems** rather than pursuing purely high-growth or purely opportunity-

driven trajectories. Advanced analytical and structured growth competencies (like data visualization or aggressive scaling) were less salient than relational and resilience-based capabilities.

The **TF-IDF (Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency) analysis** is also conducted (a statistical method) to identify the most theoretically relevant and distinctive skill themes associated with specific research questions, rather than just the most frequently mentioned ones. The analysis further validated that Gender-Related Barriers (specifically navigating structural bias) and Desired Institutional Support are high-priority "thematic peaks," representing the most acute pain points for the participants.

## Labour Market Analysis

While focus groups provide subjective internal insights, the Labor Market Analysis was undertaken to serve as a critical **"external reality check,"** grounding the project in objective economic data from the partner regions. The strategic objective was to cross-reference what entrepreneurs believe they need with actual labor market supply and demand to ensure that the project addresses high-value competencies required for business survival and innovation. By performing this systematic **"gap analysis,"** the team identified emerging economic trends—such as the urgent need for digital transformation and psychological resilience—thereby future-proofing learning pathways against shifts in the European economy.

## Regional Highlights and Critical Gaps

- **Hungary:** Women-owned businesses are underrepresented (only 14% fully female-owned), with a notable **confidence and risk-aversion gap**. Critical skill gaps include core financial literacy, sales conversion, and practical digital business skills.
- **Italy (Marche Region):** Entrepreneurship is strongly linked to family, with women struggling against the **"double burden"** of business and care duties.

Businesses are overwhelmingly micro-sized, with gaps in digital literacy, online presence, and financial autonomy.

- **Portugal (Azores):** Characterized by "**insularity**" and dependence on local markets. There is an urgent need for digital transformation and strategic planning to transition from "drifting" operations to defined growth strategies.
- **Türkiye:** The ecosystem shows rapid modernization but remains constrained by **patriarchal structures**. Foremost barriers include limited access to finance and weak high-value networks, with critical gaps in advanced digital/AI skills and institutional navigation.

## Validation of the Skills Matrix

To validate the Skills Matrix, which includes specific competencies required for women to succeed in entrepreneurship, the focus group and labor market findings were systematically coded using the project's established codebook. An expert panel was conducted to check the robustness of the findings.

The **expert panel** responsible for validating the project results consists of **22 international stakeholders** from **Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Turkey**, representing a "Quadruple Helix" of innovation. This multidisciplinary group is composed of 7 experts from academia (professors and researchers), **8 from the private sector** (CEOs, founders, and consultants), **5 from NGOs** (directors and presidents), and **2 from public institutions** (government officers and Members of Parliament). The panel possesses high professional authority, with **50% of the members being veteran leaders** holding over a decade of experience in their respective fields. To validate the Skills Matrix, these experts utilized a 7-point Likert scale to evaluate the framework's strategic alignment with project objectives, its contribution to new knowledge, and its practical appropriateness for the target groups. Furthermore, experts provided importance ratings for 17 skill themes—with Networking & Social Capital receiving a 95.6% relevance score—and offered qualitative insights through interviews and open-ended comments to ensure the matrix functions as a high-impact, practical tool for women's professional growth.

This cross-analysis also demonstrated a "**strong convergence**" between the lived

experiences of focus group participants and objective market data. Only a small number of new first-order codes were required to fully capture market realities: Digital Literacy (identified in HU and ITA) and Psychological Resilience (identified in TR). Because these new codes fit seamlessly into existing themes and dimensions, the original hierarchical structure of the Skills Matrix was confirmed as robust and empirically grounded.

## **Cross-Country Report**

Finally, the Cross-Country Comparative Analysis was conducted to ensure that project interventions are both inclusive of universal European challenges and sensitive to unique national socio-economic contexts. This analysis revealed that women entrepreneurs adapt their competency configurations based on available resources, such as Italy's reliance on dense social networks versus Hungary's focus on internal psychological capital. By recognizing these distinct profiles, the project avoids a "one-size-fits-all" support model, allowing for the design of contextually rational mentoring and policy recommendations that specifically address the unique structural barriers and signature competency gaps found in each partner country.

### **Comparative Entrepreneurial Orientations**

The **Cross-Country Report** moves beyond quantitative frequency to reveal **four distinct entrepreneurial orientations** shaped by unique socio-economic and cultural contexts:

- **Italy (Relationally Embedded):** Women build ventures through dense social networks, relying on **social capital**, relational empathy, and community networking as core resources.
- **Hungary (Psychologically Intensive):** In the absence of strong external networks, women rely on **psychological capital**, focusing on identity reconstruction, self-awareness, and disciplined self-regulation.
- **Portugal (Institutionally Structured):** Orientation is toward **institutional capital**, emphasizing strategic mapping, regulatory literacy, and navigation of formal funding mechanisms.

- **Türkiye (Opportunity-Driven):** Characterized by market alertness, **opportunity capital**, and persuasive stakeholder engagement to identify and act on market gaps despite uncertainty.

## **Key Competencies and Shared Realities**

The distribution of capital types explains why certain skills are prioritized. Italy and Türkiye lead in Relational & Social competencies, while Hungary accounts for over 40% of the dataset's frequencies in Self-Regulation & Drive, highlighting a need for internal resilience where external support is structurally deficient. Portugal shows extreme dominance in Uncertainty Management (88%), opting for systematic structuring over improvisation. Conversely, Türkiye leads in Risk-Taking (59%) and Spotting Market Gaps (60%), prioritizing implementation over prolonged analysis.

Despite these differences, Gender-Institutional Navigation (n=66) is a universal theme across all four countries. Structural and normative gender barriers—such as care-work integration and social norms negotiation—constitute a shared reality for women entrepreneurs across contemporary Europe.

## **Policy and Training Implications**

The analysis cautions against a "one-size-fits-all" approach to entrepreneurship support. Recommendations for context-sensitive interventions include:

- **Hungary:** Prioritizing the building of **relational infrastructure** through peer mentoring.
- **Italy:** Focusing on **individual analytical capacity** and financial discipline to complement existing social strengths.
- **Portugal:** Investing in informal networking spaces to provide **flexibility** outside of rigid institutional systems.
- **Türkiye:** Building **operational discipline** and strategic mapping to mitigate the risks of an improvised, opportunity-responsive approach.

Ultimately, these profiles represent **contextually rational adaptations** to specific environments, and recognizing this variation is essential for designing effective, inclusive support programs.

As a summary, the research conducted establishes a robust, evidence-based Skills Matrix by synthesizing the lived experiences of 36 focus group participants with objective labor market data and the strategic verification of 22 international experts. This validated framework, consisting of 65 granular skills categorized into 17 broader themes, reveals that female entrepreneurship in contemporary Europe is a deeply embedded process that is relationally intensive, operationally grounded, and psychologically demanding. While distinct national orientations emerge—such as Italy’s social embeddedness versus Hungary’s reliance on psychological capital—navigating structural gender barriers remains a universal reality shared by women across all partner regions. Ultimately, these findings provide the essential building blocks for context-sensitive training and mentoring programs designed to help women navigate professional transitions with strategic agility and resilience.

# Bridging The Skill Gap for European Women Entrepreneurs →→

A consolidated summary of women's entrepreneurial skill profiles, market realities and cross-country differences among VoWoCo project countries

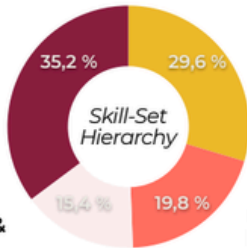
## The Global Entrepreneurial Capability Model

Based on evidence-based situation analysis across Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Türkiye, involving 36 focus group participants and 22 international experts.

PRIMARY PILLAR

### Relational & Social

- Networking
- Empathy
- Institutional navigation



### Management & Operations

- Financials
- Digital tools
- Leadership

### Cognitive & Strategic

- Strategic planning
- Opportunity recognition

### Personal & Behavioral

- Resilience
- Self-regulation
- Drive

**95,6 %**

of project experts rank "Networking & Social Capital" as the highest priority theme.

## The Top 5 "Nuclear" Skills for Success



Strategic Mapping



Domain Expertise



Relational Empathy



Navigating Laws



Resilience

## Regional Profiles & Gaps

The 4-country comparison

*Hungary*



**The Psychologically Intensive Profile**  
Focused on internal self-regulation and identity reconstruction due to limited social capital.

Dominant orientation:



Internal Architecture

Primary competency gap:



Relational & Community Networking

*Italy*



**The Relationally Embedded Profile**  
Success is built through dense social networks and high levels of relational empathy.

Dominant orientation:



Social Complexity

Primary competency gap:



Opportunity Recognition & Market Scaling

*Portugal*



**The Institutionally Structured Profile**  
Emphasis on strategic mapping, regulatory literacy and formal capital access.

Dominant orientation:



Technical Viability

Primary competency gap:



Operational Flexibility & Risk Orientation

*Türkiye*



**The Opportunity-Driven Profile**  
Characterized by high market alertness, risk-taking and persuasive stakeholder engagement.

Dominant orientation:



Market Persuasion

Primary competency gap:



Structured Planning & Financial Discipline

This infographic is just a snapshot of a wider European research journey to support women entrepreneurs with evidence-based tools — discover more about the VoWoCo project:

[www.vowoco.eu](http://www.vowoco.eu)



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